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BRISTOL — The state's congressional delegation is solidly behind the town's efforts to extend its sewer line to Newfound Lake, Congressman Charlie Bass (R-NH) told a group of citizens who gathered at Gilly's Restaurant Tuesday morning.

Bass was in town to join Executive Councilor Ray Burton for the start of their annual district tour, which was to take them to Plymouth and Colebrook before ending with an overnight stay in Pittsburg.

"I've been waiting five years for this day," said Bass, noting that he and Burton had established a tradition of spending a couple of days with each other, traveling to one or the other of their districts to meet with people and hear their concerns.

"I don't think there's anyone between here and Pittsburg that Ray doesn't know," Bass said, to which a member of the audience added, "By first name."

While Bass said New Hampshire's congressmen and senators are in agreement on the sewer project and that "it's a top priority for me in my district," he noted that "earmarks are a thing of the past" and federal funding is not guaranteed.

"These days it's hard to guarantee funding for anything," he said.

The \$28 million project that voters approved at town meeting is contingent upon receiving 75 percent federal funding.

Selectman Joe Denning said the town is solidly behind the project in order to protect the lake, and Selectman Rick Alpers noted that the town is paying a lobbyist \$60,000 to try and secure the federal funding.

Former water and sewer commissioner, Burt Williams, who has been advocating the sewer extension for more than 40 years, said, "I'm convinced that the economic health of this town is dependent on the lake" and that the Newfound Lake Water Quality Management Project will ensure the protection of that resource.

State Rep. Paul Simard (R-Bristol) also commented that the project is needed for the lake, but also, "It's going to mean jobs."

The sewer project has been a hard sell through the years, not only because of the expense, but also because many people feared that extending the sewer to the lake would open it up to unbridled development.

The zoning ordinance that now places limits on development based on the land's ability to meet

septic requirements has fewer requirements when the property can connect to the municipal sewer system.

Many lake residents also have opposed the sewer extension because it will require them to tie into the system after having spent significant sums of money to install private septic systems.

Alpers said the planning board is very progressive and will be ready to act to address those concerns when the sewer extension takes place.

"The town will have to make some changes to address growth at the same time," he said. "There will be some things that get by but the planning board can address that the following year."

As to those who object to hiring a lobbyist with sewer funds, Alpers said the town is using money from the sewer capital reserve fund. While the fund is intended to pay for emergency projects, Alpers said there is a healthy reserve and the town took on the lobbyist for one year to guarantee the federal funds.

Simon Thomson was present from U.S. Senator Kelly Ayotte's (R-NH) office to lend support to the effort.

After the breakfast at Gilly's and accompanied by town officials, Bass and Burton continued their tour by visiting downtown Bristol, where the town is looking to finally take down the condemned mica building owned by John Suldenski, which has been a safety concern for many years. There are plans for a major downtown revitalization as well as efforts to extend the multi-use trail that currently runs between the village and Newfound Lake. The town hopes to see the trail run from the old Bristol Depot along the Pemigewasset River to Profile Falls in south Bristol.